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THE
SPIRIT OF THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY:

A SERMON

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S E R M O N .

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”—2 TIMOTHY i. 7.

THE largest gifts and rarest endowments may become inoperative for want of culture and exercise. The most auspicious and promising outset ends in disappointment and disgrace, unless followed by diligence, zeal and fidelity. The seed is God-given, and the soil has in its bosom the elements of fertility; but without assiduous tillage no harvest will be gathered, or a scanty growth will mock the eye and baffle the hope. The theory of the Christian ministry, as of the Christian life, is steady advance and beautiful development. Experience and practice are to improve and establish the character, strengthen the intellect, enlarge the capacity for usefulness; while the graces of the Holy Spirit are to shine forth in growing lustre and completeness. Matured piety, devout affections, expanding benevolence, answered prayers, and precious fruits of toil, are expected to adorn the Minister of Christ as he travels onward towards the goal. But this is not a thing of course, and

unhappily the result is sometimes quite different. The neglected plant withers, the lamp unfed by oil from the sanctuary burns dimly, and, peradventure, goes out in darkness. It is a sad thing when the generous impulses of the beginner weaken with the friction of the course, instead of gathering strength and vigor—when the freshness and animation of youth are lost without gaining the holy wisdom, matured graces, mellowed piety and purer devotion of sanctified years. And yet I fear, brethren, it is no very uncommon thing. Talents are given us to be improved, time to be redeemed, mental endowments to be cultivated, Christian graces to be exercised—and this is an imperative necessity.

How impressively is this point exhibited in St. Paul's injunction to Timothy, "Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God that is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

The gift conferred upon Timothy must have been as choice and precious as was ever imparted for the exercise of the Christian ministry. It was preceded by a pious education, for from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures. It was given him by prophecy, with the laying on of hands of St. Paul, and of the Presbytery. The youthful evangelist enjoyed the intimate friendship and counsel of the great Apostle. He lived in an age when the Holy Ghost attested the word with mighty signs and wonders. And yet he is exhorted to "*stir up*

this gift," as one might stir up a waning, smouldering fire from its ashes and cinders. Even the *charisma*, conferred under such favorable circumstances by apostolic hands, might by neglect become inoperative and inert. St. Paul's own son in the Gospel needed exhortation to energy, faithfulness, and patient continuance in well-doing; and the companion and observer of the course of this lion-hearted witness for Jesus must be warned against selfish timidity. "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, nor of me his prisoner."

The *charisma* imparted to Timothy may have included miraculous endowments. But if so, these enviable gifts did not constitute its most precious part. Of still higher value was the quickening, enlightening, sanctifying and sustaining grace of the Holy Spirit.—This was pre-eminently the ascended Saviour's gift to his expecting disciples—his gift, limited to no age, to no order, to no department of the work; but the holy flame that was to burn in every heart of evangelist and pastor, and to touch every tongue that should plead successfully for Christ. The Holy Ghost is the abiding caller, illuminator, strengthener, director of the ministry of reconciliation. It is immaterial whether we interpret "the spirit of love, and of power, and of a sound mind," as the Holy Ghost himself, or as the influence imparted, the mind and character wrought by him in the recipient. The great truth is the same. "The spirit of love, power, and soundness of mind," is the

characteristic of an acceptable minister of the New Testament, and this the Holy Ghost bestows upon those prepared to receive it at their solemn ordination. All ministers need this precious endowment as much as Timothy; all should expect it in faith; all should cultivate it by diligent exercise, for gracious and inestimable as the gift is, it must be *stirred up*.

We present the passage, then, as a striking and comprehensive representation, from an inspired source, of the spirit becoming the Christian ministry.

And at the outset the Apostle declares that it is not the "spirit of fear." He abjures and repudiates the timidity that shamefully avoids danger and shuns the cross. The burden of the ministry indeed is peace. Its weapons are not carnal. Personal injury it should be more ready to suffer than to resent. But Christian meekness and forbearance have no affinity with mean-spiritedness or abject fear. The servant of the Lord should be superior to unworthy considerations of personal detriment and danger. Holy boldness is as much required of us as gentleness and love. The spirit here condemned is often exhibited in the avoidance of the cares, responsibilities and duties of the sacred calling, as Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord when commanded to preach to Nineveh. We observe it in "the unprofitable servant," burying his talent and excusing his delinquency by imputing harshness to his master. It is the disposition that leaves a duty undone, lest peradventure it be not done aright. It is ever alive to ap-

proaching perils, and apprehends a lion in every path of self-denying duty. It keeps the eyes wide open, earthwards, but never looks up to heaven; discerns the threatening phantom, but not the Almighty Saviour; hears the tramp of the approaching foe, but not the trumpet blast of the coming king, and presents no shield of faith to the fiery darts of the wicked one. This spirit in the ministerial office often lurks under the cloak of prudence and expediency, is morbidly fearful of giving offence, deals very tenderly with men's consciences, is only outspoken against sins to which its hearers are little tempted, and loves the praise of men more than the praise of God. This unworthy timidity St. Paul utterly reprobates. It was no part of the master's character; it is to be abjured by the servant.

In contrast with this pusillanimity is presented "the spirit of power;" calm confidence, holy boldness, fixedness of purpose, and strong determination to cleave to the Lord Jesus, and press on in the path of duty through whatever obstacles and dangers. This is the courage not of constitutional temperament, but of grace; not a natural endowment, but a fruit of the Spirit, often adorning those whose original disposition is sensitive and shrinking. It belongs to the heart that eyes God rather than man, and looks beyond immediate loss or gain to the recompense of reward. It holds favor, popularity, reputation, or even personal safety, cheap in comparison with the approval of conscience and of God. It is valiant for the truth without being rash or obtrusive,

and shrinks not from the unwelcome task of rebuking sin and exposing error. Honest fearlessness clothes the Christian ministry with immense power. It wields "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God," with a force that cannot be withstood. It deals not in vague generalities, but comes home with directness to men's hearts and consciences. It summons the sinner to the bar of God, and unfolds the broad and perfect law of Jehovah. It grasps the grand and solemn realities of sin and salvation, accountability and judgment, temptation and victory, heaven and hell, and scatters to the winds vain excuses and refuges of lies. This was the element of power in such men as John the Baptist, Paul reasoning before Felix, Luther at the Diet of Worms, and stout old Latimer preaching before Henry VIII. on the seventh commandment. The occasions for its exercise vary, but even in the most peaceful and propitious times it is an essential qualification of the ambassador for Christ. The fear of man is a snare incident to every period and position, and few are the spheres of duty which do not involve such peril. Where this principle is wanting, love degenerates into weakness, and gentleness becomes imbecile. This is to impart a firm, manly tone to the pulpit, and fidelity to pastoral counsels—to make the minister never ashamed of Christ and his words, or solicitous to avoid the reproach of the cross. This is the spirit promised to the recipient of the sacred office, when solemnly set apart thereto with the laying on of hands. And this gift is *to be*

stirred up by constant remembrance of the presence and desire for the approval of Him, whose we are and whom we serve.

But we need not restrict "the spirit of power" to that holy resoluteness which is contrasted with unmanly timidity. We would extend its significance, and include other sources of ministerial efficiency; whatever personal quality gives strength, energy and effectiveness to our work. The Christian ministry is presented on the pages of the New Testament as a mighty instrumentality. Its influence is to be felt over the earth, and extend through the ages. Thus is the mission of the great Apostle and High Priest to be carried onward; the kingdom of God to be built up, and the kingdom of Satan to be subverted; the world to be reclaimed; and souls innumerable to be rescued from the bondage of corruption, and brought to the enjoyment of the glorious liberty of the sons of God. We may be at times disheartened, when we contrast the pattern drawn in Holy Writ with the present actual performance. But though the treasure be placed in earthen vessels, it is none the less a treasure. Weak, erring mortals are employed, but they are Christ's ambassadors. Though in their own felt and conscious insufficiency they are "with us in weakness, and fear, and much trembling," yet do they "preach the Gospel with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven." Though their success often fall far short of their aims and desires, yet does it, on the other hand, often surpass their own estimate; and

though it may be with tears that they scatter the precious seed, there is assurance that they shall return with joy, laden with their ripened sheaves. Our own ministry, beloved young friends, should be one of power. It is no secondary mission that we fulfil, no unimportant place that we occupy, either in the Church of God or in the social system. When the plans of the statesman are forgotten, and the name of the conqueror is obliterated from the marble or granite, the effect of our labors is to tell upon the destinies of men with unutterable consequences. Let me now briefly present some of those points which constitute the true power of the Christian ministry.

I. A ministry clothed with power must be a heaven-sent ministry, commissioned from above, moved to this office by the Holy Ghost. It is the prerogative of the Divine Spirit to call laborers into the harvest field. The Church only gives her sanction to those who avouch their own trust, and give her chief pastors reason to believe that they are called of God. If the outward commission be important, how much more the inward designation? This, I may suppose, has been the subject of earnest consideration and prayer with those whom I now address. I refer to it simply as indispensable to the effectiveness of our office. Ministers may be useless because they are not Christ's ministers. They have run unsent: have thrust themselves into the holy office without a divine call. They may have taken up the ministry as a respectable profession, to attain a liveli-

hood, to exhibit their gifts and talents, to gratify injudicious friends, or as mere proselyters to their own ecclesiastical body; not constrained by obedience to Christ and love for the souls of men. Such persons may have their reward, get what they seek, obtain the desired support or reputation, but their reward is of the earth, earthly. They did not engage in the work to glorify and honor Christ, and he does not honor them. The Spirit did not call them, and therefore the Spirit does not bless their labors. Their heart is not in the work, and their work does not prosper. Nominally they are shepherds, but the sheep do not hear their voice.—Of such are the men who care more for the fleece than for the flock—who are for widening and smoothing the narrow way—who would make the yoke easy and the burden light, not by filling the wearer's heart with love, trust and hope, but by taking off the weight of the cross. We may not indeed be so exposed to this danger as where the Church leans upon State patronage and rich endowments. Nevertheless, it is a danger, and one likely to increase with the external prosperity of the Church. It calls for caution and vigilance on the part of those in responsible positions, lest in anxiety to recruit the ranks of the Ministry we encourage such as are not truly called, and it demands honest self-examination on the part of those looking forward to the work.

The persuasion of a divine call, the sober, earnest, conclusion of the conscientious seeker for light that this is his bounden duty and high vocation, lends vast power

to the ministry in the confidence and energy which it imparts. Such a conviction mightily sustains the laborer in seasons of trial and discouragement. Believing that the Lord hath sent him, he is sure that the Lord will not forsake him. He can both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of God. Whether cheered or not by immediate fruits, he goes on patiently and steadily knowing that his labor shall not be in vain in the Lord. This conviction gives singleness to the eye, energy to the will, firmness to the step, and confidence to the heart. This sweetens toil, endears self-denial, and triumphs over obstacles and difficulties; makes faithful and fervent heralds, earnest pleaders, unflinching standard-bearers. Our work to be successful must be a work of faith. The men who succeed in any pursuit, and leave deep their impress, are always those who are sustained by strong conviction and lofty principle. The inspiration of a grand idea is an element of immense power. Men argue forcibly and eloquently for a cause that has penetrated to the core of their being, and wrought itself into their life. In the Apostles we see this impulse sanctified and baptized. "We believe, and therefore speak." They knew by whom they were sent, and for what purpose they were sent. And in proportion as ministers are imbued with their feeling, and participate in their faith, they will see the work of the Lord prosper. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak. And whatsoever may be the hearer's prejudice or dulness, he will not doubt that the man who addresses him is wholly in earnest.

The trust that we have been “inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost” is intimately connected with our personal experience of the transforming power of the Gospel.—No such solemn and elevating conviction will dilate the heart wherein Christ is not dwelling by faith. “Seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.” The trust of mercy received, the knowledge of Christ’s preciousness, the sprinkling of the blood of atonement upon our own hearts and consciences, must precede and accompany a well-grounded conviction of our divine commission. It cannot be supposed that the Lord will call those who are still dead in trespasses and sins to deal with sinners. Who can preach with success an unknown Saviour? an unfelt Gospel? The richest intellectual furniture, the widest range of theological knowledge, will not compensate for the want of simple, child-like faith, and soul-converse with God. A ministry of real power must be a ministry of faith and prayer. And to sustain the vigor and life of the ministry, the new life of the soul must be healthful and flourishing. “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” The heart and the work act and re-act upon each other. The closet animates the pulpit. If the Christian grow in grace, the ambassador will grow in zeal and impressiveness. If the man follow closely the great Shepherd, the pastor will feed the flock. For real power, then, the minister must believe that he is doing

the Lord's work, at the Lord's bidding, and with the assurance of the Lord's benediction--and this he cannot honestly, firmly believe, unless he be living a life of faith in the Son of God.

II. The Apostle describes the spirit of the true minister as the *spirit of love* as well as *power*. We may, indeed, consider love as one of the prime elements of power. Our errand is one of unmingled benevolence. It is the carrying onward of the great plan of divine love to a lost world. As the Father sent the Son, so doth the Son send his ambassadors. Ours is not the frequent commission of the old prophets, the denunciation of vengeance and wrath; but we lift up a crucified Saviour that men may be drawn unto him. A tender compassion for the misery and danger of sinners becomes our work. We open the refuge, we unseal the fountain, we point sin-sick souls to the Great Physician. And the spirit of love should breathe in all our exhortations and warnings. "Knowing the terrors of the Lord we *persuade* men." We must often encounter opposition and prejudice. Our exposures of sin will be distasteful and offensive to the self-satisfied and secure. We have arrayed against us worldliness, covetousness, sensuality, pride and obduracy, and must not spare them. If we conciliate enmity and disarm opposition, it must be not by concession, but by "the spirit of love." The reproof launched in a tone of unsympathizing harshness will fester and rankle in the breast, and leave incurable wounds, while, imbued with

tenderness, it will often be kindly received. Undissembled affection throws a mighty power into words, and looks, and tones. The minister who is under its influence is not like one who is haranguing sinful mortals from a lofty eminence, a messenger from a distant world; but is in their midst, one of themselves, sympathizing, patient, forbearing, considerate, yearning over their souls with intense solicitude. This was the spirit of Martyn, longing "to throw himself at the feet of sinners, and entreat them not to plunge into an eternity of torment;" of Paul, when "by the space of three years at Ephesus, he ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears;" of Jesus, when "he beheld the city and wept over it." It is to be learned only at the Master's feet. It cannot be assumed or counterfeited. The wolf may wear sheep's clothing, but the wolfish nature will betray itself. The spirit of love is the peculiar badge and ornament of the Christian ministry, distinguishing it from all sacerdotal castes and mercenary priesthoods. It is, through God's blessing, to open their way to the hearts of men, and melt down as with coals of fire the iron and the rock. As this heaven-sent charity glows in our breasts, it will make our ministry a ministry of power, and the weapons of our warfare mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.

III. It would seem scarcely necessary for me to specify, among the elements of power in the Christian ministry, adherence to the great Apostolic theme, Christ crucified. If this be lost sight of what claim have we

upon men's attention? what right to be heard at all? When the ministry do not present in its integrity, richness, freeness and simplicity, "the glorious gospel of the blessed God," Samson is shorn of his locks, and Ichabod may be written on the temple walls. Such a ministry may please the fancy and gratify the taste by well-trimmed essays and rhetorical beauties; it may stimulate the intellect; it may refine the moral perceptions, and conduce to social order and improvement. Or if it fall below this standard it may foster sectarian bigotry; or lull men into delusive slumber; or gain for inordinate assumptions a servile, superstitious reverence; but it will not turn men from darkness to light, nor save souls from death. It is "Christ crucified" that is "the power of God and the wisdom of God." To no other preaching are the influences of the Spirit pledged. This is the head and front of our mission, the very embassy of reconciliation—peace to the rebel, light to the blind, love to the lost, hope to the despairing, life to the dead.—Neither is this any narrow enunciation or mere repetition of a few familiar doctrines, but there is a wide compass of truth and duty, of which the cross is the luminous centre and hallowed inspiration. That ministry can never be powerless which holds up before dying men a dying Saviour: which startles sinners with the call, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light;" which proposes immediate justification to the returning penitent; opens wide the door of heaven; presents the water of life to every

thirsting soul, and draws all motives to holiness and good works from the Lamb slain upon Calvary, and the King of kings returning speedily to reign. Oh, as we stand between the cross and the judgment-seat, let us not turn aside to trivial and impertinent topics, waste our own strength and our people's time in things that concern not their everlasting peace. It was the death-bed confession of a man of eminent talents and learning, "I have spent a laborious life in doing nothing." Whether or not it were a just description of his course, it might well be adopted by solemn triflers in the sacred office, whose time, and strength, and hearts are devoted to the mere accessories and appendages to the sanctuary, while souls slumber on in spiritual lethargy, and "the Judge standeth before the door." May it be the testimony of each of these dear young brethren, in the hour when heart and flesh fail: "Although a weak, unworthy, unprofitable servant—seeing in the retrospect of my ministry much to lament and regret—I have yet sincerely preached the Gospel of the grace of God, and desired to 'know nothing among my people save Jesus Christ and him crucified.' Were I to be sent back to renew my course I could make no change in this respect—except to be more earnest, faithful, single-hearted and distinct in the presentation of this gracious and glorious message."

IV. I might bring to your notice other points that conduce to the power of the Gospel ministry, especially that "spirit of a sound mind" here conjoined with love—

that well-regulated judgment, chastened fervor, tempering of zeal with knowledge, just estimate of the relative place and importance of doctrines and duties, appreciation of circumstances, discernment of characters, dealing with the actual world and with men as they really are, and not with the ideal and the imaginary, the mingling of the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove. The want of this qualification often greatly interferes with the comfort and usefulness of the ministry. Mainly it must be learned from experience, and not in lecture-rooms. But there is a promise, "If any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."—The unfortunate mistakes sometimes made by beginners are in most cases attributable to self-sufficiency and self-seeking, while the humble who desire to sit at the feet of the great Teacher will be upheld and directed.

The present time demands a ministry of real earnestness, godly sincerity, eminent prudence and lofty devotion. We live at a crisis adapted to call forth the highest style of manhood. You, my young friends, do not enter upon your work, as we who preceded you, in the land of peace, with serene heavens and cloudless skies. You stand front to front with stupendous national convulsions and grim-visaged war. Friends, brethren, parishioners are enduring the hardships of the campaign, and facing death at the cannon's mouth.—This new and stern experience of the nation is felt more or less in every calling, in every congregation, in every

hamlet, in every home. It imposes peculiar duties upon Christian ministers, and reaches them in many solemn and affecting ways. Men suffer more, and because they suffer more, can do more for great objects than in ordinary times. Shall the soldiers of Jesus Christ shrink from "enduring hardness," while the soldiers of their country are so self-sacrificing and resolute? If the latter despise physical danger, shall the former be deficient in moral boldness? Does not an heroic age demand Christian heroism? And while the men in the field are daring, suffering, bleeding, dying, shall the servants of the Lord be consulting ease, comfort and safety! Oh! this is a season when emphatically "the spirit of love, and of power, and of a sound mind," is expected both by God and man of those who stand on the walls of Zion. Our school is like a vessel launched forth upon a stormy sea. If God in his mercy restore peace and unity to our country, the origin of this Institution will be forever associated with the stirring and awful events that are now taking place around us. May it produce men equal to the dread emergency, full of vigor and holy resolution, who will bear the standard of the cross in the front of the battle, and sooner die than give up their colors. Through the blessing of the great Captain of salvation, may this school send forth intrepid champions for truth and righteousness; faithful pastors; fervent and successful pleaders; foreign missionaries, counting not their lives dear unto themselves, so that they may finish their course with joy, and the ministry

which they receive from the Lord Jesus; self-denying itinerants for the frontier and the forest; city missionaries who will go out into the streets, and lanes, and cellars, and garrets, and compel the famishing to come in; men baptized with the Holy Ghost and with power.— May the lives and labors of its first graduates stamp its birth with the true impress, and lay broad and deep the foundation for its future reputation and usefulness.— May its early alumni be worthy pioneers of a host of earnest and successful heralds of Christ, who shall hold forth the Word of Life, class after class, and rank beyond rank, until the arch-angel's trump shall sound, and “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe, in that day.”